

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY, 10012, U.S.A. TEL: 212.431.5795 FAX: 212.431.5755

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NY MASJID : The Mosques of New York Nov. 23 - Jan. 30, 1997

NY Masjid: the Mosques of New York is an exhibition that analyzes the ways in which the architecture of mosques contributes to the city's diverse Muslim communities. Through an investigation of the disparate architecture that spans from the Islamic Cultural Center, a luminous multi-million dollar dome structure at Third Avenue and 96th Street, to the nameless mosques carved out of brownstones and warehouses throughout the five boroughs, NY Masjid invites the viewer to reflect upon the issues that deal with the eclectic urban fabric of these communities. In addition, this exhibition will explore the texture and creativity that grows from the tensions that are created within a complex urban environment and examines one segment of a burgeoning urban order of ambivalent borders and identities.

These issues will be analyzed and investigated through photographs, essays, interviews, and interpretive texts that will serve as a testimony of the builders and users of the mosques, while documenting an American cultural minority who maintain divergent identities and whose media image has often strung taut between Orientalizing myth and nationalistic polemic.

What is singular about NY Masjid is the method in which issues of community and identity are studied. The approach is to examine architecture and how it is a place for community activities and meanings; how a community selects and fashions that space according to its means and cultures; how that space is perceived by its users and transformed by the activities that occur there.

NY Masjid was curated by **Jerrilynn Dodds** and **Ed Grazda**.

Jerrilynn Dodds is a professor of Architecture and Theory at the School of Architecture of the City College of the City University of New York.

Dodds writes, 'The issue of Domes and keel arches is a complex one. These are forms which were embedded into the American and European imagination as part of the Colonial discourse. They are coded with sensuality and the carnivalesque, and there is a temptation to interpret them as Orientalist forms. But to give them a strictly Orientalist interpretation is to rob these gestures of their enormous power to transform the urban landscapes into which they intervene, and to deny the youth and vitality of the social and cultural forces from which their invention springs.'

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"New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York"

This is an exhibition of a collaborative project aimed at documenting and interpreting the mosques that each of New York area's Muslim communities has built at its center. Among the many goals of **New York Masjid** is to find, in fact, how Muslims use Architecture to create and reflect, not only their attempts to protect a divergent way of life, but also to create a new identity, that of American Muslim--New York Muslim--through the creation of new architectural forms. How architecture makes a place for all of these activities and meanings; how a community selects and fashions that space according to its means and goals; how that space is perceived by its users and transformed by the activities that occur there: these are the questions we hope to address in **New York Masjid**.

The project will be executed in two phases: (1) an exhibition of plans, drawings and photographs of the mosques, including commentary and quotes from project interviews and (2) the publication of a catalogue of the mosques studied in the project, with interpretive essays by the project team members. The project team is headed by **Jerrilynn D. Dodds**, Professor of the City College School of Architecture, Photographer Edward Grazda and includes in its research and fieldwork team a number of young Muslim architects including: Khidir Abd'Allah, Layla Bahbahani, Khader Humied, Numreen Qureshi, and Justin Weiner.

New York Masjid will be the first comprehensive study of the Mosques of New York. There has been some recent scholarly interest in contemporary Islamic architecture in the United States, but there have been no studies that treat the architectural expression of an entire city, not just the opulent, new built mosques of prosperous communities.

From the following 12 buildings, a more complete documentation of five buildings for the exhibition proper will be drawn:

Manhattan:

- a. Islamic Cultural Center (96th Street at 3rd Avenue)
- b. Masjid Malcolm Shabazz (Lenox Avenue at 116th Street)
- c. Medina Masjid (401 East 11th St.)

Queens:

- a. Masjid Albidin (104-14 127th Street, Richmond Hill)
- b. Al Khoie benevolent Association
- c. Masjid al Falah (101-03 43rd. Ave. Corona)
- d. Masjid al Ber (36-05 30th St.)

These forms have been appropriated over time and invested with new meanings by a struggling new community. They have been reinvented by communities whose experience of being Muslims have required redefinition in a non-Muslim urban landscape.

Some domes and arches have taken on a pan-Islamic meaning for immigrant and African American Muslims, who assign a new pan-Islamic meaning to the form now through association of their domes with important monuments from the formation of Islamic architecture: with the Dome of the Rock and Medina. These are domed buildings that appear on the only floats in New York's Muslim Day Parade: evocations of a community that must be represented by spaces and ideas rather than people and narrative. These are buildings whose history belongs to all Muslims. Perhaps we are witnessing the formation of a new American Mosque architecture, one disengaged from ethnic and national difference; one responding rather to the needs of New York Muslims "whose links" the community leader Dawd Assad has said "now supercede national identities". Among the many goals of "The Mosques of New York" is to find, in fact, how Muslims use architecture to create and reflect, not only their attempts to protect a divergent way of life, but also to create a new identity, that of American Muslim--New York Muslim--through the creation of new architectural forms. How architecture makes a place for all of these activities and meanings; how a community selects and fashions that space according to its means and goals; how that space is perceived by its users and transformed by the activities that occur there. These are the questions we hope to address in "NY MASJID".'

Ed Grazda is a distinguished documentary photographer who is known for his explorations of cultural representation in the urban 20th century. In "NY Masjid", Grazda chronicles the interaction of Muslim communities and urban mosques in a style that parallels the quiet power of community prayer. He explores the interaction with New York City - within a world over which many who are non-Muslims often feel a kind of visual and interpretive hegemony. And yet Grazda sees devout Muslims, at once part of the city, incrementally challenging and transforming its functions, its spaces, and its profiles. The images are of American Muslims and immigrant Muslims at divergent moments in their communities' assimilation. These photos mark the creativity that surges when visual imaginations coincide and collide. They chart a contemporary world without borders, an urban territory whose landscape is being formed, and remade each day.

The exhibition has further involved the collaborative work of young architects and architecture students from The School of Architecture of City College: Khader Humied, Layla Bahbahani, Khidir Abdall, Numreen Qureshi and Justin Weiner.

Opening reception: November 23, 6-8pm at StoreFront for Art & Architecture located at 97 Kenmare St. NYC. The gallery is open 11-6pm, Tuesday-Saturday.

- e. Bosnian Cultural Center (Astoria)
- f. Masjid Abu Bakr (141-49 33rd Flushing)

Brooklyn:

- a. Masjid at Taqwa (1266 Bedford Ave)
- b. Masjid al Farooq 552-4 Atlantic Ave)
- c. Masjid Daud (143 State Street)
- d. Fatih Cami (5911 8th Ave)

Bronx:

- a. Masjid Taqwa wa Jihad (901 Anderson Ave)

Staten Island:

- a. Masjid al Nour
- b. Albanian Mosque

NY Masjid: Exhibition at Storefront for Art and Architecture
Curator: Jerrilynn D.Dodds

Exhibition Team:

Khader Humied -Administrative Coordinator, Research and Fieldwork

Khidir Abdalla-Research and Fieldwork

Leyla Bahbahani-Research

Justin Weiner-Models and Graphics

Photographs by Edward Grazda

The exhibition presented at **Storefront for Art and Architecture** is one that employs a number of strategies for representing the architecture at the heart of New York's diverse Islamic communities. **NYMasjid** is a project in which photographs, essays and interviews interact to document and interpret the mosques that each of New York's Muslim communities has built at its center. Its goal is to reveal the ways in which these buildings reflect and create identities for Muslims within a dense and diverse urban fabric; to explore the texture and creativity that grow from the tensions that are created within a complex urban environment. We hope in this way to create a document that bears visual witness to a number of cultural minorities whose combined image for Americans is often strung taut between Orientalizing myth and nationalistic polemic. We explore these issues through the testimony of the builders and users of mosques in the five boroughs, through an analysis of the spaces and images they create for themselves, and through photo documentation of a community occupying and transforming that architecture.

1. **The photographs of Edward Grazda**, taken during three years of fieldwork with Professor Jerrilynn D. Dodds, include both grand and intimate visions of communities worshipping and functioning within their mosques. The relationships built over time by Dodds and Grazda with many Muslim communities have allowed them to document not only architectural forms, but activities and events, and at times moving and intimate interactions.

The photographs are exhibited in three distinct formats: (1) large format photos of communities and life in New York mosques will be exhibited individually; (2) short photographic essays of themes that bind divergent communities might be gathered. Some examples are: facades and signs, prayer, the imam and the community within the mosque, how communities mark out qiblation (orientation towards Mecca) in New York, the dome as real and imaginary marker, traditional and new, invented ornamentation, holy days and special celebrations. Finally, (3) five mosques (one from each borough) are examined in detail, using photographs and architectural graphics.

2. **Quotes from interviews** with community members of New York's mosques constitute an important component of the text that will accompany the exhibition. These quotes are one way we seek to give voice to the communities themselves. Quotes address a number of issues, among which may be found: Muslim and American identity (what does it mean to be a Muslim in New York?); how architecture can represent Islam in New York; and the importance of mosques to maintain a community and way of life.

3. **An 8 minute Video** intercuts scenes of prayer and life surrounding the mosques with interviews with imams, and mosque community members. The video format has the advantage of presenting a more complete vision of a given architectural space, while representing more completely the complexity of activities that occupy the space. A video with a live sound track and a broad vision of activities within a number of mosques would have the effect of cutting into the frozen, complete impression left by an entirely photographic exhibition, making the interaction of these mosques with the theatre of the city of New York more immediate for the exhibition audience.

Wall list:

1. BOSNIAN CULTURAL CENTER, ASTORIA, QUEENS
 2. MEDINA MASJID, EAST 11 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 3. MASJID MALCOLM SHABAZZ, 116 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 4. EID, NORTHERN BOULEVARD, FLUSHING, QUEENS
 5. GAWSIAH JAM E MASJID, ASTORIA, QUEENS
 6. ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTER, 96 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 7. MUSLIM WORLD DAY PARADE, NEW YORK CITY
 8. MASJID AL ABIDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS
 9. ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTER, 96 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 10. ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTER, 96 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 11. MASJID ABU BAKR SEDIQ, FLUSHING, QUEENS
 12. FATIH CAMI MASJID, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
 13. ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTER, 96 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 14. MEDINA MASJID, EAST 11 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 15. FATIH CAMI MASJID BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
 16. SHAH JALAL MASJID, ASTORIA, QUEENS
 17. GAWSIAH JAM E MASJID, ASTORIA, QUEENS
 18. MEDINA MASJID, EAST 11 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 19. MASJID MALCOLM SHABAZZ, 116 STREET, NEW YORK CITY
 20. ~~AR RAHMAN FOUNDATION INC. MASJID, MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY~~
MASJID AL FAROOQ BROOKLYN NEW YORK
- PRAYER BEFORE MUSLIM WORLD DAY PARADE, MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK
CITY

CAPTIONS;

GAWSIAH JAM E MASJID, ASTORIA, QUEENS

MASJID AL ABDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS

ASSAFA ISLAMIC CENTER, ALLEN STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MALCOLM SHABAZZ MASJID, 116 STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MASJID AL ABIDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS

MASJID BAITUL MUKARRAM, ASTORIA, QUEENS

MASJID AL ABIDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS

GAWSIAH JAM E MASJID, ASTORIA, QUEENS

MASJID AL FAROOQ, BROOKLYN, NEW YROK

MASJID AL ABIDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS

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MASJID ABU BAKR SEDIQ, FLUSHING, QUEENS

MASJID MALCOLM SHABAZZ, 116 STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MUSLIM WORLD DAY PARADE, MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

MEDINA MASJID, EAST 11 STREET, NEW YORK CITY

MASJID AL ABIDIN, RICHMOND HILLS, QUEENS

AMMAR IBN YASSIR MOSQUE, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

FATIH CAMI MASJID, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

CAMI

